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SUBJECT: MASSACRE IN EASTERN CONGO LINKED TO RASTAS

¶1. (U) Summary. At least 29 Congolese villagers were killed the night of May 26-27 near Kanyola southwest of Bukavu in a massacre called "the worst in South Kivu since May 2005." An additional 27 were reported injured, and at least 18 have been reported kidnapped. Although some press reports claimed the massacre to be the work of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), its leader Ignace Murwanshyaka denied his group's involvement from his headquarters in Berlin. The UN Mission to the Congo (MONUC) contacts in Bukavu indicated that they believe a group called the "Rastas" are responsible for the attack. Three additional companies from MONUC have been deployed to the area to reinforce peacekeepers in the region. End summary.

¶2. (U) Seventeen villagers were killed in their beds by a group of 10 to 12 suspected "Rasta" militia members in South Kivu province during the night of May 26. At least 27 villagers were seriously injured, and up to 18 other villagers were kidnapped from three different villages near Kanyola, 30 miles southwest of the provincial capital of Bukavu. According to local sources, one kidnapped girl managed to escape and reported that 18 hostages total had been taken, and that three hostages had been killed. Since the initial attacks, MONUC reported that 12 corpses were later found in the surrounding forest areas.

¶3. (U) The attackers reportedly killed most of the villagers in their beds, using machetes, sticks, knives, and hammers. Notes were left on some of the victims, bodies claiming the killings were reprisals for recent campaigns against rebel groups by the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC). In Nybuluze, 13 people were killed; three were killed in Muhungu village; another was killed in the village of Chihamba. According to MONUC reports, Pakistani peacekeepers encountered the attackers during the raid on Chihamba and opened fire on them.

¶4. (SBU) MONUC condemned the attack and launched an operation to rescue the kidnapped villagers and apprehend the rebels in conjunction with FARDC forces. Four abductees have since been recovered by MONUC forces, and investigations are continuing. Injured victims are being treated in Kanyola as well as at the Walungu hospital, and the Walungu administration decided to delay the burials to aid the investigation. MONUC contacts report that three additional companies have been deployed to North Kivu to support the peacekeepers in the field. MONUC's South Kivu Battalion Commander told poloff that MONUC believes members of the Rasta group are responsible for the atrocities.

¶5. (U) MONUC investigation teams sent to the region on May 28 and 29 reported that they were met by angry villagers who barricaded roads and threw stones. Although one armed escort

of Pakistani peacekeepers was allowed to pass, the civilian staff reportedly returned to Bukavu.

¶6. (SBU) FDLR leader Ignace Murwanashyaka denied from Berlin his group's involvement to the BBC, stating (comment: disingenuously) that "the FDLR has never attacked civilian populations." He denounced the "ignoble and abominable killings" and called for a probe into the identity of the attackers.

¶7. (U) The Rastas are often described as a Congolese group created by the FDLR. Others describe them as Congolese militia members or "bandits" who sometimes fight alongside the FDLR. The Rastas have been implicated in other attacks and atrocities, including an incident in July 2005 in which 40 civilians -- mostly women and children -- were burned to death in a "retaliatory" attack.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: This attack may increase calls for resolution to the FDLR problem, even though this particular attack is likely attributable to a different group rather than the FDLR's mainstream. The attack was probably retaliation for recent FARDC offensives against armed groups operating in South Kivu. The response of the villagers in the region, who turned away MONUC investigators, suggests they fear further reprisals will follow if there is even the semblance of cooperation with authorities. End comment.  
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